The Cantos Study Guide

The Cantos by Ezra Pound

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Introduction

The difficult, sometimes frustrating, often moving, occasionally brilliant epic poem *The Cantos* is Ezra Pound's most significant contribution to world literature. The poem, though, is rarely read all the way through, and Pound is better remembered for his short poems, his early theoretical writings and manifestoes, and his turbulent personal history. This is unfortunate, because in *The Cantos* are some of the most beautiful and powerful passages in twentiethcentury poetry. Written over more than fifty years, the poem is a document of the rise, reign, and fall of a literary style, a generation of artists, and a way of life. Pound was perhaps the central figure in the development of modernism, not only in literature but in fiction, drama, sculpture, and even music, and in *Cantos* so many of his enduring concerns and artistic innovations are present, both as prefigurations and reminiscences of the heady days of the 1920s and 1930s. Although the poem is erratic, difficult, and at times willfully obscure, it merits careful attention and has much to reward the patient reader.

Author Biography

One of the most significant literary figures of the twentieth century, Ezra Loomis Pound was born in Idaho in 1885. His family soon moved to the suburbs of Philadelphia, where Pound grew up. In college at the University of Pennsylvania, he met Hilda Doolittle and William Carlos Williams. Pound and these two poets became friends and colleagues in the burgeoning "Modernist" movement. Pound transferred to Hamilton College before returning to the University of Pennsylvania for postgraduate studies in Provencal.

Pound never received his Ph.D., and after one disastrous year of teaching college in Indiana he moved to Europe in 1908. Settling in Venice, Pound published his first book of poems, *A Lume Spento*, there before moving on to London. In London, Pound used his forceful personality to insert himself into the avant-garde literary scene. In the twelve years he spent in London, Pound helped wrest literature from the fusty Georgian style of such writers as Swinburne and Henry James (both of whom he admired greatly), forging the lapidary, dynamic modernist style. In the process, he befriended W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, Wyndham Lewis, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, Richard Aldington, and many others.

World War I was a great tragedy for Pound, and he felt that after the war ended the atmosphere of literary experimentation that dominated pre-war London had died. He wrote his great cycle "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" as a farewell to the city in 1920, and left. Moving briefly to Paris, Pound found that city not to his liking—probably because his role as impresario and dominant personality was already held by Gertrude Stein—and came to Italy in 1924. He stayed in Italy for twenty-two years, during which time he came to greatly admire Mussolini and Italian fascism. In these years, Pound was studying economics and history but had also thrown himself fully into the composition of *The Cantos*, his epic "tale of the tribe" that he would never complete. During World War II, Pound, who had grown increasingly convinced that the American economic system was harmful, made radio broadcasts on Italian state radio and was indicted for treason in the United States. After Mussolini fell, Pound was captured and held in the U. S. Army's Disciplinary Training Center in Pisa, Italy.

Pound was returned to America and, because the authorities felt that he was mentally unfit to stand trial, was incarcerated in St. Elizabeth's mental hospital in Washington, D. C., for thirteen years. During this time Pound continued to write and to collect disciples—admirers, poets, critics, sycophants, and crackpots. He was released in 1958 and returned to Italy. After an initial burst of activity, Pound grew depressed and fell into a silence. He made few public appearances in the 1960s, contenting himself with living in Venice, and died there in 1972.

Plot Summary

A Draft of XVI Cantos

The first installment of cantos appeared just as Pound was leaving Paris. Published in a small, limited, expensive edition with medieval-looking illuminated capitals, the book was self-consciously aimed at an exclusive public. In these first sixteen poems, Pound introduces the themes that he intends to pursue throughout his long "poem containing history."

The first canto, certainly one of the finest, is both a retelling of the story of Book 11 of Homer's *Odyssey* and a modeling of the "palimpsestic" mode of the construction of poetry that Pound uses throughout *The Cantos*. A palimpsest is an ancient piece of paper or parchment that has been written on a number of times at different points in history. On a palimpsest, the traces of the earlier writing are incompletely erased and are visible. Pound was fascinated by this idea. In this first canto, Pound uses a number of "texts." Obviously, Homer is the most important—it is his book that is the source text —but we learn at the end of the canto that Pound has found his text of Homer in a Latin translation from 1538. Pound's own translation (of a translation) sounds less like Latin or Greek or contemporary English than it sounds like his earlier translation of the Anglo-Saxon poem "The Seafarer." So here we have an Anglo-Saxon sounding version of a Latin version of a Greek poem that Pound found in a book on the banks of the Seine in Paris.

Much of the rest of this installment continues in this vein. From Homer we go immediately to the Provencal troubadours' stories as retold by the Victorian English poet Robert Browning, to China, and back to Homer. The third canto takes us to Pound's own life, recently arrived in Venice and sitting "on the Dogana's steps." Canto IV reels around the Mediterranean as it goes from the smoking stones of destroyed Troy to the ruins of a Roman arena in Verona, Italy. These cantos, through number seven, introduce Pound's themes: history, the persistence of the image, the senselessness of violence and destruction, the beauty of human accomplishments.

In Cantos VIII through XI, Pound tells his version of the story of the Renaissance Italian condottiere Sigismondo Malatesta, the lord of Rimini who fought as a mercenary and was condemned by the Pope to burn in hell. Pound's attraction to Malatesta was complicated, but he was particularly struck by how Malatesta used his power not to amass more power or money but to create a court of artistic and intellectual accomplishment—the "Tempio Malatestiano," a church in Rimini that is more dedicated to Malatesta and his wife, Isotta, than to God or a saint, remained one of Pound's favorite artistic accomplishments.

Canto 13 introduces the Chinese and Confucian theme that will dominate much of the Cantos, and in its quiet beauty could not contrast more with the cantos that follow it, the so-called "Hell Cantos." In these cantos, Pound's predecessor becomes Dante (it has

already been Homer, Browning, and Confucius), but Pound's hell is not a place of unholiness but of money-worship and the befoulment of art and artists. This first installment ends, in Canto 16, with hell brought forward to the twentieth century.

A Draft of the Cantos 17-27

The second installment of cantos appeared in 1928, published by another small press (John Rodker's). Instead of beginning with Homer, in these poems Pound begins with a vision from Ovid and a glimpse, following the horrific Hell Cantos that ended the previous installment of his "paradiso terrestre," his earthly paradise. In these cantos, Pound begins in earnest to examine the history of banking and finance, concentrating on the Florentine state and on the industrialization of America, and especially focuses on the links between banking and war.

A Draft of XXX Cantos

A limited edition of this book appeared from the Hours Press in Paris in 1930, but in 1933 the American trade publisher Farrar & Rinehart published Pound's cantos for the first time in the United States (and T. S. Eliot's company, Faber & Faber, published the book in a trade edition in Britain at this time). This book reprinted the poems of the first two installments and added three cantos, ending with the short Canto 30. In this final canto, Pound brings us back to the Greek world where we started, but moves in and out of the Italian Renaissance (mentioning Cesare Borgia and the Malatesta). The book ends with the death of Pope Alessandro Borgia, who represents both the intrigue and the culture of the Renaissance.

Eleven New Cantos

Soon after Pound's *A Draft of XXX Cantos* appeared in the U. S. and Britain, Pound published the next eleven cantos with the same publishers. This 1934 volume reflects Pound's increasing concern with economics and his growing fascination with and admiration for Mussolini. Canto 31 is based on the correspondence between Thomas Jefferson and John Adams. In fact, much of this volume consists of Pound's version of early American history and the Bank of the United States controversy, always with an eye to the Italian Renaissance and as a prefiguration of the twentieth century. One of the most important cantos of the whole collection, however, is Cantos 36, Pound's translation of the troubadour Guido Cavalcanti's poem "Donna mi prega." Here, Pound's enduring love of the Provencal language and the troubadour period finds its greatest expression.

The Fifth Decade of Cantos

Still consumed by economic history, Pound published his next installment of cantos in 1937. The book moves from the Monte dei Paschi di Siena, a Renaissance bank that

Pound greatly admired, to a medieval-sounding litany about "usura," to more representations of Greek myths. By this point in his long poem, Pound was being asked about how the work as a whole was structured, and responded that it was much like a "fugue: theme, response, contrasujet." Readers and critics have continued to look for the underlying structural principles in the work, and generally have concluded that it is structured much like the musical form to which Pound alludes.

Cantos LII-LXXI

Appearing in 1940, just as the war in Europe was beginning, these cantos received little notice and are generally considered the weakest installment. The first ten recount millenia of Chinese history, then Pound switches focus when he reaches 1776 and returns to America for the final ten poems.

The Pisan Cantos

These cantos were written largely while Pound was held in the U. S. Army's Detention Training Center in Pisa, Italy, and are generally considered to be the most successful of the individual collections. Amid much controversy, the book won the first Bollingen Prize for Poetry from the Library of Congress, just when Pound was being held in an asylum for the criminally insane. (The book starts at Canto 74, omitting 72 and 73, Fascist-themed Italian language cantos that Pound's publisher has now included in the complete edition of the poem.) Pound's study of philosophy appears in this book, for he was preparing to take his poem on an ascent into paradise, just as Dante did. However, these flights are accompanied by the most personal of details: reminiscences of Pound's days in London, impressions of Fascist Italy, mentions of Pound's fellow prisoners in the DTC. The book manages, better than any of the previous installments, to express Pound's ideas of the "Periplum," the wholeness of a man's life as contextualized in history, art, and politics.

Section: Rock-Drill and Thrones

Pound wrote little in his first years in St. Elizabeths hospital, but near the end of his time there he returned to the cantos. In these two volumes —one published in 1955 and the second in 1958—Pound's focus is on his method: how does one read these difficult poems? His ideal reader would have to be not just incredibly well-educated, but well-versed in a number of extremely obscure texts and ideas, not to mention competent in five or six languages. These two installments ask the reader not as much to understand as to join in Pound's "imaginative habits and the energy of his mind," in the words of Northrop Frye. Readers can enjoy the beauty of many of the images and of the command of the poetic line that always was one of Pound's greatest strengths even if one cannot understand the subject matter.

Drafts and Fragments of Cantos CX-CXVII

This book, appearing in 1968 as a response to a "bootleg" publication of the same poems, collects a few finished and a few unfinished cantos. In these poems, the tone has shifted drastically from the previous two installments. The tone of erudite confidence and the sense of haranguing are gone; instead, we return to the contemplative, sad, meditative tone that characterized much of *The Pisan Cantos*. In the eleven years between the publication of *Thrones* and this volume, Pound fell into a depression and silence. He began to regret much of what he had done and said during his life, writing "Let those I love try to forgive / what I have made." But these are the most beautiful of the Cantos: his light touch with Greek myth and with a striking image of man-made beauty illuminated by the natural light is never more notable.

Characters

John Adams

John Adams (1735-1826) was the second president of the United States. His correspondence with Jefferson forms the basis for many of the middle cantos.

The Boss, Muss

See Benito Mussolini

Confucius

See Kung Fu-tse

Isotta degli Atti

Isotta degli Atti (1430?-1470) was Sigismondo Malatesta's mistress and, later, his third wife. His love for her is demonstrated all over the Tempio Malatestiano by the intertwined initials S and I.

Kung Fu-tse

Confucius (551-479 B.C.) is the moral anchor of *The Cantos.* Pound compares the moral precepts of the West, especially those of Aristotle, against Confucian ideals and finds the West's lacking. Perhaps the most important dictum of Confucius for Pound's poem is his insistence on exact terminology; Pound feared and hated the inexact use of language, and *The Pisan Cantos* are suffused with Pound's regretful sense that he violated this precept in his wartime broadcasts.

Ixotta

See Isotta degli Atti

Thomas Jefferson

The third president of the United States, Jefferson (1743-1826) was a proponent of agrarian democracy and opposed centralized banking systems.

Sigismondo Malatesta

Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta (1417-1468) was the lord of the Italian city of Rimini and a famous "condottiere," or Renaissance courtier. By the time he was 13, Malatesta was fighting in the field, leading his troops against Papal armies—and winning. These experiences were the prelude to a violent life in which Malatesta struggled against the Popes Pius II and Paul II. Malatesta held his own, and at the same time built a court in Rimini. This court, for Pound, was an example of enlightened governance, bringing the artists Agostino di Duccio and Piero della Francesca to Rimini to help in the decoration of the church of San Francesco, also known as the Tempio Malatestiano.

Benito Mussolini

The Fascist party leader and Italian dictator Benito Mussolini (1883-1945) was Pound's contemporary and one of his idols. Pound met with him once, in 1933, having sent "il Duce" an economic program, and felt that he could sense Mussolini's intelligence in their brief encounter. He retells this story in Canto 41. Mussolini returns in Canto 74, the first of the Pisan series, when we see him and his mistress Clara hung "by the heels at Milano." After the Italian fascist state fell, the Nazis took Mussolini to the northern Italian city of Salo and set up a puppet government there. As the Allied forces penetrated northward, the Italian partisans captured Mussolini, executed him, and displayed his body in the main square of Milan.

Siggy

See Sigismondo Malatesta

Themes

The Palimpsest

A palimpsest, most simply, is a piece of paper or parchment that has been written on a number of times and on which the earlier writing has been only partially effaced. But the term also designates a building that incorporates an earlier building, especially one from a previous historical period. The image of the palimpsest is both a structural principle for *The Cantos* and one of its most important themes. Pound began his adult life as a scholar of Provencal, the Latinate language spoken in southern France, and in his early years in Europe he traveled extensively in the Provence region. In that part of France, as in much of Europe, cultures are laid on top of each other both metaphorically and literally. Roman architecture and literature were important influences for the Provencals, and the Romans, of course, appropriated Greek themes and religion. Pound loved Provence and Provencal troubadour literature, but he traced its influence forward, to Dante and from there to the Italian Renaissance and to modern times.

Pound strongly believed in the idea, most pithily stated by the American novelist William Faulkner, that the past is not gone—it is not even past. Throughout *The Cantos* Pound argues how the past underlies our present beliefs and practices. He felt, for instance, that one could not understand modern war and finance without carefully studying the foundations of modern banking in Florence and Siena. His obsession with the idea of the image or the "luminous detail" found a correlative in his study of the Chinese ideogram, in which he felt that the very ideas at the base of language itself were expressed in pictorial and verbal form. In an early poem, "The Return," he writes of the ancient gods of the classical world waking up in modern times and returning to active life. They are not dead, he felt; they are just dormant, but their influence lives. Perhaps the most striking palimpsest in the poem is the first canto, in which Pound translates into Anglo-Saxon sounding English a Latin translation of a Greek text that he found at a Paris bookstall.

Beauty

Although Pound is often faulted for how his *Cantos* so often consist of transcribed historical documents and are thus barely artistic, much of the poem is concerned with the search for beauty. Pound was not a nature poet and did not find beauty to reside solely in nature, as did the early Romantics. For Pound, the collaboration of human creation and natural forces—especially light—create the greatest beauty. He is fascinated with the strong sunlight of the Mediterranean as it illuminates the ruins of ancient cultures, and he imagines those cultures when they were young. Human striving is not vain, for Pound. He admires strong historical figures who seek to create both beauty and justice. Unfortunately, Pound often set forth as models historical personages whom we have come to understand were cruel people—Benito Mussolini, most notably, but also Sigismondo Malatesta, Pope Alessandro Borgia, and others. But he also

admires Confucius, Dante, Guido Cavalcanti, John Adams, and like men who wanted to create cultures in which art and governance worked together, not in opposition.

But the strongest parts of Pound's poem are his descriptions of beauty. In haunting lines, Pound describes images that strike us as beautiful but that, for the poet, also exemplify good governance and healthy culture. Such passages as "Seal sports in the spray-whited circles of cliff-wash," "Gods float in the azure air, / Bright gods and Tuscan, back before dew was shed," or "Thus the light rains, thus pours, *e lo soleills plovil* / The liquid and rushing crystal / beneath the knees of the gods" from the first installment of cantos remain in the memory. In later installments, the same kinds of images return: "To build the city of Dioce whose terraces are the color of stars," he says in canto 74, and in one of the final cantos he concludes with the memorable line "A little light, like a rushlight / to lead back to splendour."

Time and History

Time is a constant theme in *The Cantos* , and history is the poems' most important element. As he conceived of his epic, Pound described it as "a poem containing history" and as "the tale of the tribe." Pound mixes together diverse times constantly, often in adjacent lines. Almost all of the cantos jump wildly around in time. Rather than using chronology to construct his poem, Pound structures his poem with ideas and images, and he can move easily through history and geography, connecting ancient China to the nascent American republic, for instance. His ideas of time are related to Faulkner's, for both men feel that the past is not, in fact, past. But where Faulkner examines one small area of the United States and focuses on how the past is never dead in or for that area's inhabitants, Pound follows concepts and relations, comparing them in vastly different periods.

Style

The construction of *The Cantos* is extremely complex. It is an epic, so it involves a journey, but unlike the *Odyssey* or the *Aeneid* the journey is not through space but through history. Pound initially thought of his poem in terms of Dante's medieval epic the *Divine Comedy*, in which the poet journeys from earth to the depths of hell, then ascends through purgatory to the heights of Heaven. But Pound's poem does not do this in any linear fashion. The first canto presents, in Pound's translation of a translation, Odysseus' preparations to journey into the underworld, and in these early cantos, Sigismondo Malatesta braves terrestrial and spiritual hells. The first section of cantos ends with the famous "Hell Cantos," which present images as horrific as anything since Dante.

But after the first sixteen cantos, the Dantean structure fades. Pound provides the reader the occasional glimpse of what he called his "pdiso terrestre," the earthly paradise, especially in his descriptions of light glinting off artworks such as the mosaic over the doorway in the church at Torcello, Italy, but for the most part the bulk of the cantos are concerned with what might be "purgatorio," or the world of history. Entire cantos are enumerations of Chinese rulers or of the correspondence between Thomas Jefferson and John Adams. Only in the last few cantos does Pound begin to concern himself fully with what is in his paradise, and over the .fty years he spent writing the poem he seems to have come to the conclusion that paradise is both fleeting and the most simple of things: "Do not move / let the wind speak / that is paradise," he says in a fragment for one of the final cantos.

Perhaps the best description of the structure of the poem is Pound's. At times, he told friends that he had built the poem to mirror the construction of the musical fugue, a form that consists of the announcement of a theme in one voice, the echoing of that theme from other voices, and the contrapuntal development of that theme. Pound diagrammed this in 1927 as "A. A. Live man goes down into world of Dead. C. B. The 'repeat in history.' B.C. The 'magic moment' or moment of metamorphosis, bust through from quotidian into 'divine or permanent world.'" He wrote in 1944 that his epic "begins 'In the Dark Forest' crosses the Purgatory of human error and ends in the light."

On a lower level, the individual cantos are structured not as coherent narratives but as details linked together imagistically. Canto 3, for instance, begins in Venice, where Pound "sat on the Dogana's steps / For the gondolas cost too much, that year." He muses on the appearance of Venice in 1908, talking about such specifics as the Buccentoro rowing club and the citizens "howling 'Stretti,'" a line from a popular song, but quickly moves to the baths at Baden, Switzerland, and from there to Burgos, Spain. These details are linked by images and concepts: the air and colors of Venice make Pound think of Tuscany, which makes him think of the ancient gods and nymphs. From that fleshy, earthly image he jumps to a Roman text about the baths where young women bathe nude. For Pound, the image was the basis of all poetry, and communicated not just a picture in the mind but "presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time," in his words of 1912.

Historical Context

Pound wrote his *The Cantos* over a long period of time—the first canto was published in 1917 and the final installment to be published during Pound's lifetime appeared in 1968. Needless to say, these years were turbulent; they constitute the majority of the last century. But Pound's poem is especially steeped in history: his own description of the poem as he formulated it was "a poem containing history." History, therefore, both formed the raw material for the poem and impinged upon its construction and creation.

When Pound first thought of writing his "tale of the tribe," he was living in London and had gained a great deal of fame as a literary impresario and provocateur. From the time that he arrived in London —1909—he had set himself the task of wresting art and literature from the nineteenth century into the twentieth. To achieve this end, he did everything: he served as a foreign editor for American publications, he "discovered" such writers as T. S. Eliot, he edited anthologies, he promoted operas, he gave money and materials to sculptors, he harangued and wrote and dashed about the city, an unforgettable figure in his pointy beard and cape.

But by 1920, Pound had tired of London. WWI had taken its toll on the writers and artists he sponsored, and London's openness to artistic experimentation was waning. Pound wrote his wellknown *"Hugh Selwyn Mulberry"* poem cycle in 1920 and moved to Paris. He only stayed there a few years, though, feeling that Italy was a better place for him to be to work on *The Cantos*, the poem that now consumed his energies. In the 1920s, as Pound finished the first thirty cantos, he grew increasingly interested in European and American history and economics, subjects that supplemented his already extensive knowledge of Chinese and Provencal history and art and of classical civilization. *The Cantos* began to be Pound's "tale of the tribe," the "tribe" being intelligent, artistic, culturally-minded people. In his historical research, Pound came across a number of men who brought together what he saw as political justice, economic wisdom, and an artistic temperament and *The Cantos* quickly became a tale of how those men—Jefferson and Adams, Confucius, Malatesta—had to fight against the venality and stupidity of their contemporaries.

Unfortunately for Pound, though, he felt that his time's answer to these "factive personalities" was the Italian fascist dictator Benito Mussolini. Through the late 1920s and the 1930s, Pound began to write more and more on economics and argued that Mussolini's programs epitomized the kind of humane system that Pound hoped to see succeed in the world. In Cantos 42 through 71, Pound wrote extensively on Chinese and American history, but Mussolini's name and ideas come up more and more often. Even more disturbing is a growing anti- Semitism in the poems. Consumed by a hatred of banks and always possessed of an affection for medieval times, Pound concluded that powerful Jews were behind the world banking system. Exacerbating Pound's fascist and anti-Semitic sympathies were his very real mental problems—by the late 1930s Pound was showing clear signs of paranoia.

Pound returned to the United States briefly in 1939 and gave a few speeches, but managed only to convince his audiences that he was a crank or just mad. When war broke out in Europe, Pound was forced to remain in Italy, and for the duration of the war he lived there. To earn money, he made broadcasts on Italian state radio, broadcasts filled with anti-Semitism and venom directed at President Roosevelt. In 1943, Pound was indicted for treason in the United States, and as the war was ending he was captured by Italian partisans and turned over to the U.S. Army. He was kept in a cage in Pisa for a while before being returned to the U.S. to stand trial.

Upon his arrival in Washington, D. C., Pound was found mentally un.t for trial and sentenced to detention in a mental hospital. However, at this same time, a collection of the poems that he had written while held by the Army, *The Pisan Cantos*, appeared, and to many readers they were the best poems Pound had ever written. As ever, they were difficult and relied on an enormous body of crosscultural knowledge, but for the first time Pound shows weakness, doubt, and regret about his actions and beliefs. In these poems, he is as honest with himself as he had ever been. While in the hospital, he published one other set of cantos before his 1958 release.

When he was released, he returned to Italy to live out the rest of his life quietly. But Pound's epic engendered many difficult questions for American culture about the relative places of art and politics. Should a traitor be lauded by his nation for his poetic accomplishments, as Pound was when he won the Library of Congress' Bollingen Prize in 1949? Can a man with abhorrent beliefs write great poetry? Can that poetry be great when it expresses those beliefs? Pound's *The Cantos* continues to cause critics and general readers to examine their ideas about these complex issues.

Critical Overview

Critical opinion on Pound's *The Cantos* is more divided than is the critical opinion on any other important modernist work, and the epic's critical fortunes have risen and fallen with time. Even during the half-century during which the work appeared in installments, readers and critics were widely divided on the poem's merits. As the critical literature on *The Cantos* is vast, here we will look only at how some of the most prominent writers and critics have felt about Pound's epic.

As the poem was being composed, even Pound's close friends and admirers were unsure about the structure of the poem—how it fit together and what it would look like as a whole. The Irish poet William Butler Yeats wrote in 1936 that "the relation of all the elements to one another, repeated or unrepeated, is to become apparent when the whole is finished. . . Like other readers I discover at present merely exquisite or grotesque fragments." Yeats felt that the poem had "more style than form; at moments more style, more deliberate nobility and the means to convey it than in any contemporary poet known to me, but it is constantly interrupted, broken, twisted into nothing by its direct opposite, nervous obsession, nightmare, stammering confusion."

T. S. Eliot echoed Yeats' criticisms, writing in 1946 that "*The Cantos* there is an increasing defect of communication, not apparent when he is concerned with Sigismondo Malatesta, or Chinese dynasties, but, for instance, whenever he mentions Martin Van Buren. Such passages are very opaque: they read as it the author was so irritated with his readers for not knowing all about anybody so important as Van Buren." Eliot praised Pound's influence in the highest terms, but was less enthusiastic about his most important poem.

In 1950, the prominent English critic F. R. Leavis responded to Eliot's opinions on Pound. Like Eliot and Yeats, Leavis felt that Pound did not use the historical sources well. "Pound's various addictions," he wrote, "speak the amateur: one cannot doubt his enthusiasm, but something else, surely was needed to impel significant innovations in poetry." But where Eliot felt that Pound's importance as an influence was immeasurable, even if the meaning of his poem was opaque, Leavis felt that this "limited very drastically the kind of importance that can be attributed to *The Cantos*."

Pound's greatest defender among literary critics has been the Canadian Hugh Kenner, who wrote the first book-length study of Pound's work, *The Poetry of Ezra Pound*, in 1951, and who contributed the single greatest work of Pound scholarship, *The Pound Era*, twenty-one years later. In *The Poetry of Ezra Pound* Kenner forcefully answered Pound's critics. After the appearance of the Pisan section of cantos in 1948, he wrote, "it is no longer easy. . . to dismiss *The Cantos* as either formless or irrelevant. Pound impinges upon the citizen of A.D. 1950 or whenever, not via his psychological tensions. . . but through a rational amalgam of morals and politics." Kenner's book was the first to argue that the epic was in fact an epic with form; Kenner made it possible for a large group of scholars to write on Pound without having to defend the poet on charges of formlessness or sloppiness. For Kenner, "Pound's structural unit in *The Cantos* is not

unlike the Joycean epiphany: a highly concentrated manifestation of a moral, cultural, or political quiddity [the essential quality of a thing, its 'suchness']."

Although *The Cantos* were constantly criticized for being formless—and Kenner's work only provided a means of defense, it did not dispel all of the objections to Pound's poem—few critics ever took issue with Pound's poetic strengths. Perhaps Pound's most important innovation was in his use of the line. Pound's close friend William Carlos Williams admired *The Cantos* primarily for Pound's command of the poetic line. "Pound's line is the movement of his thought. . .they have a character that is the parcel of the poem itself," he wrote. Eliot, Leavis, and others all praised this aspect of *The Cantos* and of Pound's work in general.

The Cantos, for all of its difficulty, was an important inspiration for a number of other poets who saw in Pound's long "poem containing history" a different model for the epic. John Berryman's *Dream Songs*, Louis Zukofsky's *A*, and Charles Olson's *Maximus Poems* all were deeply influenced by Pound's innovations. In the 1960s, more criticism was written on Pound than on almost any other American poet, and many of the young poets of the period, ranging from the Buddhist poet Gary Snyder to the southern nature poet Charles Wright, saw Pound as their most important ancestor. In recent decades, with the decline of the "New Critical" method that studied poems in isolation from their context, Pound's poems have come under increasing criticism. Even as readers and critics discover Pound's innovations and inventions, they also have come to understand just how central Pound's disturbing political opinions have to do with the poem. This attention to Pound's biography and beliefs, coupled with *The Cantos'* inherent and undeniable difficulty, have made the poem almost disappear from college poetry surveys. But at the same time, this increasing attention to Pound's biography and beliefs is also "rehabilitating" him, showing that he was indeed a good friend to hundreds of artists of all kinds and that he was perhaps the central figure in literary modernism.

Criticism

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BOOKRAGS

Critical Essay #1

In this essay, Barnhisel looks at the Cantos *in their historical context. He argues that the poem became the focal point for a debate in American culture whose ramifications went far beyond the poem, Pound, or even literature.*

Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, the masterpiece of one of modernism's central figures, is perhaps the least read of any of the great works of modernism. The poem is difficult, certainly. It asks the reader to come to it with a vast array of knowledge of languages, historical events, and mythologies. It is written imagistically, as a string of images and fragments strung together by a logic that is hard to decipher. It expresses opinions that are unfamiliar and foreign at times and at other times are disturbing and offensive. For these and other reasons, few college poetry courses bother to include more than a few excerpts from *The Cantos* and few readers outside of academia bother with the poem.

Yet many critics feel that the poem is the great epic of modernist poetry, and some feel that it, not James Joyce's *Ulysses*, is the greatest work of modernism. Pound was a central figure in the development of modernism, both in terms of facilitating the careers of other artists and writers and of developing the techniques that would become the hallmarks of modernism. Pound's lifelong dictum was "Make it New!" and the drive for innovation inspired most of his artistic endeavours. His early poems are some of the most familiar works of literary modernism and almost no course in American poetry omits such poems as "In a Station of the Metro," "Sestina: Altaforte," or "The River-Merchant's Wife."

But the issue of *The Cantos'* difficulty is really not the central one when we ask ourselves why the most important poem by one of the most important figures in modernism is rarely read. After all, T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" remains popular and is hardly easier than *The Cantos*. Today, students learn a little bit about Pound early; high school English classes often read "In a Station of the Metro" to illustrate metaphor, and freshman literature survey courses read a few of his poems in their modernist units. But if the reader wishes to venture any further into Pound's work, he or she is immediately confronted by the "big issues" of Pound's life and beliefs. This is neither a conspiracy on the part of Pound-haters nor is it unjustified: in order to understand *The Cantos*, one must be conversant with the historical events, personages, and economic ideas that really are the central subject of the poem. But acquaintance with what Pound did in his life and what he thought, combined with the difficulty inherent in reading *The Cantos*, makes students reluctant to undertake the project.

The relationship of Pound's ideas to his poetry is a topic that has been central to public understanding of the poet since at least the late 1920s. Cultures have always tried to balance out the competing claims of aesthetic value and a "good message" in art. In the fifth century before Christ, Plato banished the poets from his imaginary "Republic" because art encouraged dissent and disreputable ideas. In the seventeenth century, John Milton tried to use art to rally English people against the abuses of royalty while at the same time the elites were creating aesthetically rarefied art for themselves. The

essential question for all of these writers and thinkers was whether art can be viewed entirely aesthetically, or solely in terms of its artistic and creative attributes, or whether art always bears some traces of, comment on, and responsibility to the society that produced it.

Pound's *Cantos*, with its attacks on Roosevelt and Alexander Hamilton and their advocacy of Italian fascism and anti-Semitism, was a problematic poem in this context. During the 1930s, while most readers had begun to just ignore Pound, many critics felt that the poem would indeed be a great work if Pound could ever come up with a coherent structure for it. But how could literary critics ignore the admiration of Mussolini? how could they dismiss as unimportant the poem's attacks on Jewish bankers? The answer lies in the profound changes that occurred among American cultural intellectuals between the 1930s and the 1950s.

After the Great Depression, in the 1930s Socialist and Communist movements met some success in the United States. On the East Coast and especially in New York City, many young intellectuals, most of whom were from Jewish immigrant families that had labored in poverty, gravitated to Communism. Communist groups published magazines and newspapers, including poems, fiction, and literary criticisms by these young intellectuals. But by the late 1930s, a small group of Jewish intellectuals from New York grew tired of the strict rules the Communist Party of the USA (CPUSA) had set regarding the art and literature that should be supported. Adhering to the Soviet line, the CPUSA advocated so-called "Socialist Realism," realistic art that exalted workers and their struggles.

This group of breakaway critics (who became known as the New York Intellectuals) disagreed. They sought out art that was more daring, more abstract and experimental. Forming their own journal, *Partisan Review*, the New York Intellectuals forged their own kind of cultural criticism: strongly left-wing, anti-Nazi but also anti-Soviet, seeking out new and avant-garde art as a way to undermine the bourgeois complacency of the United States. This group included Mary McCarthy, Delmore Schwartz, Philip Rahv, Irving Howe, Clement Greenberg, Lionel Trilling, and many others. They felt that art had a responsibility not just to society, as the Socialist Realism doctrine held, but also must seek aesthetic goals that have nothing to do with morals or ethics or societal aims. James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, James Baldwin, and the abstract expressionist painters were some of the artists favored by the New York Intellectuals. However, as most of this group was Jewish, they were very suspicious of Pound.

As the New York Intellectuals were going through their educations and growing more independent, another important group of critics was forming, this one in the South. The "Fugitive Group," named after their literary journal, consisted of Southern literary men who looked back to the Old South and saw in it culture, re.nement, and an artistic sensibility. Although they initially linked their literary program strongly with the South, they quickly developed a more general methodology for studying literature of all kinds. By the 1940s, these writers (who included John Crowe Ransom, Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, and R. P. Blackmur) were becoming known as the "New Critics." Their approach to literature centered on close reading: poems should be read not with

an eye to the biography of the poet, not with attention to the political beliefs of the poet or of his time, but with the greatest emphasis placed on the inner workings of the poem. The New Critics sought out tension, ambiguity, irony within the poem, and paid extremely close attention to each individual word and all of its connotations. For them, the social value of literature—if any—was that it developed an aesthetic sensibility in readers, which would make them more sensitive and perceptive citizens.

Both the New Critics and the New York Intellectuals, therefore, believed that literature should not be judged primarily by the ideas it expresses. The form and structure of a poem, its sound, its imagery, and its innovations should be its most important attributes, and critics should pay attention to those aspects of a poem rather than to what lessons a poem teaches or what kind of man the poet is. In 1949, just as these groups were becoming the most prominent cultural intellectuals in America, they were called upon to defend these claims about how to judge art.

Ezra Pound was brought back to the United States soon after the war and was quickly put on trial. Knowing that he would be found guilty and most likely executed, his lawyer, Julian Cornell, sought to have Pound found mentally unfit to stand trial, and the judge agreed. Pound was incarcerated in St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington, D. C. The U.S. reading public was disgusted with Pound and, to make matters worse, had essentially stopped buying his books. Pound seemed destined to fade into irrelevance. But in 1948, Pound's collection *The Pisan Cantos* appeared. The book received largely positive reviews, and many readers who had dismissed Pound now began to feel again that he was a great poet. The following year, the book won the first Bollingen Prize, an award given by the Library of Congress to the year's best book of poetry.

Predictably, much of the public was outraged. How could a man be lauded by his country just three years after that country had sought to execute him for treason? The *Pisan Cantos* themselves were not innocent of those acts and beliefs for which Pound had earned such opprobrium: in the poems he laments the death of Mussolini and talks about his wartime radio broadcasts. In the *Saturday Review of Literature*, the most important mainstream book review magazine in the country, a poet named Robert Hillyer published two attacks that took as their targets Pound, T. S. Eliot, literary modernism, the Bollingen foundation, and the New Criticism. How could these people, Hillyer asked, reward art that held positions that were so inimical to the values for which America had just fought a terribly destructive war?

The Bollingen committee, which included T. S. Eliot and a number of New Critics, responded to Hillyer's objections in terms that would determine academic approaches to Pound's poetry for decades. In a communique, the committee cited the "objective perception of value," arguing that aesthetic and artistic value could be judged entirely separately from moral or social standards. Surprisingly, the New York Intellectuals agreed with the Bollingen committee. In a forum convened for *Partisan Review*, most of the contributors supported the Bollingen award. One notable exception was the poet Karl Shapiro, a member of the Bollingen committee, who stated frankly that he voted against awarding the prize to Pound because "I am a Jew and I cannot honor anti-Semites."

This cultural moment was the coalescing of a strange and unpredictable alliance. The left-wing, cosmopolitan, nonacademic, largely Jewish New York Intellectual group came together with the right-wing, agrarian, academic, largely Southern New Critics to argue that art must be judged first and foremost on aesthetic standards. As a result of this endorsement, Pound's popularity, sales, and critical respect slowly but steadily grew over the next ten years and then grew dramatically during the 1960s. *The Cantos* had the endorsement of the leading critics of the day, and readers were given license to read the poems as strictly aesthetic artifacts.

Source: Greg Barnhisel, for *Epics for Students*, Gale, 2001.

Critical Essay #2

This biographical entry of Ezra Pound in The Readers Companion to American History *describes Pound as a "catalyst for all serious artists" fighting to make their work new and describes how his work affected unknowable changes.*

Until age twenty-two Pound lived and attended schools in New York and Pennsylvania. In 1901 at the University of Pennsylvania he began a lifelong friendship with William Carlos Williams. He transferred to Hamilton where in 1905 he received a Ph.B.—a degree the school invented for him (and never offered before or since) to fit the assortment of courses he insisted on taking. He then returned to Penn. Money problems in 1907 forced him to take a job at Wabash College, Indiana, but after four months he was fired for being "a Latin Quarter type." The next year he went by cattle boat to Spain, crossed to Venice, stayed for three months, and then went to London where William Butler Yeats was and the action should be. There he became a catalyst for all serious artists who fought to realize their élan and "make it new": T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, Ford Madox Ford, Wyndham Lewis, and H. D., among others. In 1914 he married Dorothy Shakespear. She had a small income; he supported himself by writing.

His major works include, in poetry: *A lume spento* (1908), *Cathay* (1915), *Lustra* (1916), *Quia pauper amavi* (1919), and *The Cantos* (1917-1961); in prose: *The Spirit of Romance* (1910), *Noh* (1916), *Instigations* (1920), *ABC of Reading* (1934), *Guide to Kulchur* (1938), and *The Classic Anthology De- .ned by Confucius* (1954). Concurrently, he translated volumes of poetry, prose, and drama from Greek, Latin, Provençal, Japanese, and Chinese. Tirelessly, he fought Western provincialism and celebrated the great art of China, Japan, and Africa.

From Rapallo, Italy, where he lived after 1924, he conducted a worldwide correspondence with all who sought his help. But he became increasingly controversial, partly because his critics didn't know what he meant by words such as *illumination*. That word, which he said he used "in a technical sense," is the key to his life and his work and marks him as a visionary and a mystic in the Neoplatonic-Blake- Whitman tradition.

Pound's major work, *The Cantos*, expresses this tradition, as did all his acts and opinions. According to Pound, *The Cantos* was a poem containing history and concerning humanity's progress out of tribal darkness toward the light of *paradiso terrestre* to come in the future. All mystics find that the major world religions manifest tribal darkness, which they express by war and dogma, and "dogma" is the "bluff" of "tax-gathering priests" based on "ignorance." Of Christ himself he said, "He is hardly to be blamed for the religion that has been foisted upon him." The coming of paradiso terrestre is deterred mainly by the love of money, for money is power and power corrupts. Thus avarice was a central theme of *The Cantos*, in which bankers and munition makers create wars. He became known as anti-Semitic though he wrote, "Inasmuch as the Jew has conducted no holy war for nearly two millennia, he is preferable to the Christian and the Muhammadan." His anti-Semitism was due not to his

opinions on race or religion but to what Pound saw as the corrupting force of money and power.

In 1945 he was arrested for treason because of radio broadcasts he made from Italy in 1941. He spent six months at the Disciplinary Training Center in Pisa and was then flown to the United States. Being found unfit to stand trial, he was remanded to St. Elizabeth's where, before his release and return to Italy, he stayed for thirteen years. Being thus relieved of the need to make a living, he practiced his art and produced his greatest work. All his life, he had said the state should provide its artists with a "competence": money enough to exist on so they could create. Ironically, at St. Elizabeth's the state provided that competence. Even better, Congress founded the National Endowment for the Arts, which brought us a little closer to the light of paradise-on-earth when, as the final lines of *The Cantos* say, we will enter "arcanum" "To be men not destroyers."

Source: Carroll F. Terrell, "Ezra Pound," in *The Reader's Companion to American History*, edited by Eric Foner and John A. Garraty, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1991, pp. 857-8.

Critical Essay #3

Hugh Kenner relates Ezra Pound's connection with Homer and how this association both inspires and informs his Cantos. No exertion spent upon any of the great classics of the world, and attended with any amount of real result, is really thrown away. It is better to write one word upon the rock, than a thousand on the water or the sand. —W. E. Gladstone, Studies on Homer and the Homeric Age

Homer is the West's six trillion dollar man. For two millennia and a half at least we have kept him alive and vigorous with an increasingly complex and costly life-support system that from earliest times has drawn on all the technology around. To make papyrus in Egypt, then construct and navigate a ship to take it to Athens, entailed most of the chemistry, the metallurgy, the carpentry, and the mathematics accessible to Mediterranean men of the fifth century B.C. What Athenians did with papyrus was, of course, write out on it the two big books of Homer.

Parchment came later, and parchment Homers were precious spoil from Byzantium, 1453. Renaissance architects designed libraries that housed handmade copies; blacksmiths forged chains to keep them where they belonged. As soon as there were printing presses in Italy, there was a folio Homer, two volumes, printed in Florence about 1480. The next need was for a Homer you could carry around. That meant both smaller sheets and smaller type. Pound's Canto 30 shows us Francesco da Bologna incising dies with the Greek letters they'd need for the pocket Aldine Homer. To aid comprehension scholars made Latin versions, their printings embellished by the newly designed Italic characters. Readers of Canto 1 will remember one such version of the *Odyssey*, Divus's, dated 1538. And all over Europe lens-grinders were enabling presbyopic and myopic eyes to scan Homer's lines.

Our own silicon technology stores Homer and retrieves him, catalogs his words and cross-references them, relying on magnetic disks, on air conditioners, on central processing units, on central generating stations, and also on toil and ingenuity in California and Japan, to keep alive an old poet whose very existence has been repeatedly questioned. We have no such continuous record of commitment to any other part of our heritage save the Bible. The six trillion dollars I hazarded was rhetorical; what eighty generations have invested in Homer, directly and indirectly, eludes computation and nearly de.es comprehension.

For we've not even settled what the Homeric poems *are*; something more than Bronze-Age entertainments, surely? Our efforts to assure ourselves that we know what we're valuing have constituted much of the history of our thought. At one time the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were esteemed as a comprehensive curriculum in grammar, rhetoric, history, geography, navigation, strategy, even medicine. But by the mid-nineteenth century A.D. they no longer seemed to contain real information of any kind at all. Had there ever been a Trojan War? Scholars inclined to think not, much as connoisseurs of the West's other main book were doubting that there had been a Garden of Eden with an apple tree, or that planks of an Ark might have rotted atop Mount Ararat. Both books got

rescued by identical stratagems; the Bible was turned into Literature, and so was Homer. That entailed redefining Literature, as something that is good for us, however unfactual. That in turn meant Nobility, and also Style. It also required that Longinus supplant Aristotle as the prince of ancient critics, and that Matthew Arnold become the Longinus of Christian England. He said that Homer was rapid and plain and noble: by Longinian standards, Sublime. Those were the qualities a translator should reach for, in part to sweep us past mere awkward nonfact. The Bible in the same way was edifying if you knew how to go about not believing it.

In 1861, while British ink was drying on printed copies of Arnold's three lectures on translating Homer, Heinrich Schliemann was nourishing a dream. He had dreamed it since boyhood. He was going to find Troy! By 1870 he had found it, yes he had, at a place the maps called Hissarlik, found traces, too, of the great burning, and he photographed his wife Sophie wearing what he thought were Helen's jewels. (A photograph, no light undertaking in 1870, was merely the most recent of the technologies mankind's Homeric enterprise keeps conscripting.)

The story, as so often, now slips out of synch. Andrew Lang, the folklorist, published with one collaborator an English *Odyssey* in 1879, with two others an English *Iliad* in 1883. These, for various reasons not excluding the fine print of copyright law, remained the standard English versions as late as the mid twentieth century—even the Modern Library used to offer them—and they were already obsolete when they appeared. For Lang and Butcher, Lang, and Leaf and Myers had fetched their working principle from pre-Schliemann times. The way to translate Homer, they thought, was to make him sound like the King James Bible, the idiom of which has great power to ward off questions about what details mean. But what details mean—in particular what many nouns meant—was being settled year by year as men with spades ransacked Troy and Mycenae for such cups and golden safety pins as Helen and Hector knew.

Ezra Pound was born in 1885, just two years after the Butcher and Lang *Odyssey*. One unforgotten day when he was twelve or so, enrolled at the Cheltenham Military Academy in Pennsylvania, a teacher chanted some Homer for his special benefit. After four dozen years, from amid the wreckage of Europe, the man's name merited preserving:

and it was old Spencer (H.) who first declaimed
me the Odyssey
with a head built like Bill Shepard's
on the quais of what Siracusa?
or what tennis court
near what pine trees?
(C 512)

It was from "Bill Shepard" at Hamilton that he'd picked up his first Provençal enthusiasm, so the heads of these two instigators made a fit rhyme. And hearing Homer declaimed, he testified, was "worth more than grammar." Though all his life a great

connoisseur of detail, he was never easy with schoolmasters' grammar. It screened out what he thought crucial, the tang of voices.

That would have been about 1897, when it was just beginning to look as though the wanderings of Odysseus, too, might mirror an order of factuality analogous to that of the new historic Troy. In 1902 Schliemann's architectural adviser, Wilhelm Dörpfeld, explained the topography of Ithaka; in the same year, Victor Berard published the book Joyce was to use so copiously, about the origins of the *Odyssey* in Phoenician *periploi*, a noun Pound was to gloss:

periplum, not as land looks on a map
but as sea bord seen by men sailing.
(C 324)

Those are arguably the most important lines in the *Cantos*. It is characteristic of the poem's way of working that we find then embedded in a narrative about seventeenth-century China. And the word on which they turn came from the edges of the new Homeric scholarship.

The *periplous* (a Greek noun Pound transmuted into an unrecorded Latin form, *periplum*) registers the lay of the land the way it looks now, from here.

Olive grey in the near,
far, smoke grey of the rock-slide,
… … … …
The tower like a one-eyed great goose
cranes up out of the olive-grove.
(C 10)

That is an Imagist detail, also "sea bord seen by men sailing": a detail from some imagined *periplous*. If you were sailing in the track of that skipper you might not find the color useful—light shifts day by day—but "the tower like a one-eyed great goose" would help you be sure of your position: such an apparition is not easy to mistake for some other tower. Likewise the Homer we encounter in the first canto is not to be taken for Pope's or Lattimore's. Homer mutates down the centuries; we can only begin to savor the mutations when translators begin to record what they can of them.

And translators only began their notes on the *periplous* past Homeric capes and shoals when they had Homer's text to translate, some time after Byzantine scholars had carried the precious manuscripts to Italy. The first canto reminds us just what Andreas Divus did: he mapped the words in blind fidelity. The canto's resonant "And then went down to the ship" follows Divus's "Ad postquam ad navem descendimus," which in turn follows Homer's "Autar epei hr' epi nea katelhomen": *Autar*, and; *epei*, then; *epinea*, to the ship; *katelthomen*, we went down. In placing "descendimus" where he did, Divus even kept the order of Homer's words, putting the Greek into Latin, as he says, *ad verbum*, the way one inflected language can map another. With his page-by-page, line-by-line, often

word-by-word fidelity, Divus was making a crib a student in the sixteenth century could lay open beside the Aldine Greek, to get guidance you and I might seek in a dictionary. When Ezra Pound thought his Latin "even singable," he was suggesting what much later he would suggest of a fiddle rendition of Clement Janequin's *Canzone degli ucelli*, that sheer note-bynote fidelity had kept the song audible.

Can sheer blind fidelity be faithful to so much? We have come to something fundamental. A while ago we were talking of fact, the order of Homeric fact archaeologists were producing, to supplant the circumlocutions of the lexicons. Pound yielded to no one in his respect for fact, but for him the "fact" was apt to be whatever he could find right there on the page: whatever Dante might have meant by "the literal sense": mere letters, queer sounds, or even just lexicon entries. Letters, sounds, tagmemes: from the 1930s till he died he would love the Chinese character out of conviction that alone among the scripts of civilized men it collapsed all of these, shape, sound, and referent, into a sole inscrutable polysemous sign. The Chinese ideogram for "man" is a picture of a man; the Chinese spoken word for "cat" is what all cats say, "mao." If you say that "with a Greek inflection," you are saying the Greek for a catly thing, "I am eager." That's a detail we find in Canto 98 (C 686); in the late cantos especially we see words *exhibited*: isolated words, including a few of Homer's words, set off on the page by white space. Such words, though no taller than a printed line, are aspiring to the status of the ideogram. They are centers of radiance. We may think of them as opportunisms, like Shakespeare's when he rhymed "dust" with "must," mortality with necessity.

Such opportunisms irradiate the "Seafarer" of 1911. "Blaed is genaeged" says, word by word, "glory is humbled." Pound looked at "blaed," saw a sword-blade, and wrote "The blade is laid low." There's no arguing with that, and no justifying either. Nor can we argue when, in Canto 1, by a triumph of the literal, English words map Divus' words which map Homer's words and the whole goes to "Seafarer" cadences. He is following Divus because for one thing, he wants to celebrate the occasion when, thanks partly to Aldus and Divus, Homer was recovered for the West; for another because he was himself a man of the Renaissance in having been well-taught his Latin and ill-taught his Greek. Latin, even Latin verse, Pound could read at sight. Greek, even Homer's, he'd pick at, with a crib. Divus might have labored with Ezra Pound in mind. No one in four hundred years has owed him so much.

Now though Divus intended a drudgelike fidelity, still he, too, invented a Homer: whether by sheer human exuberance, or by inadvertence, or via textual error we can't always say. Now and then his Homer is not the Greek scholars' Homer. For listen:

And then went down to the ship,
Set keel to breakers, forth on the godly sea and
We set up mast and sail on that swart ship....
(C 3)

"On the godly sea?" Yes, it's alive with gods. But any modern crib, for instance, the

Loeb, says, "on the *bright* sea," and for the good reason that the Greek word is "dian," a form of "dios," one of Homer's favorite epithets, especially for the sea you push a ship into. "Eis hala dian," reads *Odyssey* 11.2: "into the bright sea." It's a formulaic phrase at the *Odyssey*'s numerous launchings.

But what does Divus have? He has "in mare divum," as if he were distracting us by a play on his own name. *Divus,* says the Latin lexicon, "of or belonging to a divinity; divine." A contracted neuter form would be *dium*, perhaps close enough to *dian* to have caused confusion in a shaky time for classical understanding. How did someone, in those days before lexicons, collect equivalences between Greek and Latin words? About Divus we seem to know nothing save that he may have come from East Asia Minor, a better place for Greek than for Latin. But however *divum* arrived on Divus's page, Ezra Pound followed him faithfully, and wrote "the godly sea":

periplum, not as land looks on a map
but as sea bord seen by men sailing

—here, as seen by a man who sailed four centuries ago, and whose compass was not wholly reliable. It is an interesting rule, that in the presence of a textual crux Ezra Pound is apt to be utterly literal. Those are just the places where credentialled scholars guess. But Pound would only guess when the text was foolproof. When he didn't understand the words, or when they diverged from convention, then he'd presuppose someone else who'd known better than he; as Divus had, in prompting him to write "godly."

"Of Homer," Pound wrote as long ago as 1918, "two qualities remain untranslated: the magnificant onomatopoeia, as of the rush of the waves on the sea-beach and their recession in

para thina poluphloisboio thalasses

untranslated and untranslatable; and, secondly, the authentic cadence of speech; the absolute conviction that the words used, let us say by Achilles to the 'dog-faced' chicken-hearted Agamemnon, are in the actual swing of words spoken." When men speak, not by the book but as they are moved to, uncounterfeitable rhythm asserts itself —"the actual swing." It eludes the dictionary, eludes mappings of "meaning": the translator has to leap for it, with his own time's live speech in his ears. Only if he makes that leap has he a chance of making us hear.

Hughes Salel, 1545, called Odysseus "ce ruse personage": that is one French way to look at *polytropos*, the Odyssey's first epithet, and from our own century we might use "that tricky bastard" as a sightline on Salel. (Yes, "bastard" is extreme, but it's part of an idiom.) Andreas Divus, 1538, has "multiscium," much-knowing, as it were "savvy." Thereafter the reality fades, and the renderings decline. Butcher and Lang, 1879, offer "so ready at need," like a detail from a hymn. A. T. Murray in the 1919 Loeb tries "man of many devices," and Liddell and Scott in their lexicon make a stereophonic mumble, "of many counsels *or* expedients." "That man skilled in all ways of contending," says the

often admirable Robert Fitzgerald, here smothering perception with poetic dignity. Nobody speaks phrases like those.

You cannot cut such a knot with a trick of idiom, not even one as stolidly idiomatic as W. H. D. Rouse's "never at a loss." The problem goes far too deep. It has been hard for many centuries to imagine what Odysseus was really being commended for. We have all inherited the Roman distrust for quick Greek intelligence—we associate it with huckstering—and translators, being men of literary cultivation, have additionally been infected with the changed attitude to our hero that set in when his name became Ulixes ("Ulysses") and he got tarred with the brush of fatal deviousness. Dante did much to propagate the tricky Ulysses. We need not blame Dante. Though he placed Ulysses in the hell of the false counselors, he had the excuse of never having read Homer. He had read Dictys and Dares, secondcentury popularizers who turned the designer of the wooden horse and vanquisher of the Cyclops into (says W. B. Stanford) "an anti-hero."

Pound read Homer's Greek slowly, Dante's Italian fluently, and it is unsurprising that the way he conceives Odysseus owes as much to Dante as it does to Homer. Luckily, he was also misreading Dante, to the extent that he was thrilling to the eloquent speech and disregarding the great flame in which the evil counselor is imprisoned. So he stressed what the speech stresses, an urgent thirst after novelty, and read it back into Homer where it is not to be found. It is Dante, not Homer, whose Ulysses grows bored in Ithaca, where no amenity, no, not the bed of Penelope,

Could conquer the inward hunger that I had
To master the earth's experience, and to attain
Knowledge of man's mind, both the good and bad.

That was where Tennyson had found a Ulysses

… yearning in desire
To follow knowledge like a sinking star
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought,

and that is what Pound is echoing in his own way:

Knowledge the shade of a shade,
Yet must thou sail after knowledge.

In its place in the *Cantos* that is a doom laid on Odysseus, spoken in the regretful voice of Circe. In making it a doom Pound is faithful to one aspect of Homer, whose Odysseus thought nothing was worse for mortal man than wandering and for whom no place was sweeter than home. That is Pound's way of compromising Homer as little as possible, all the while he is handling the hero's need to sail after knowledge, weaving it right back into a scene in Homer's tenth book, where the Greek is innocent of any such motif. Odysseus is pleading with Circe in her bedroom to be let go to continue his voyage home, and in Canto 39 the crucial six lines of her response are reproduced in the

Greek, word for word and accent for accent (a printer lost one line, but Pound gives the line numbers, and they show what he intended). No other passage of Homer gets transcribed in full anywhere in the long poem.

Possible English for what her Greek says might run: "But first you must complete another journey, to the house of Hades and dread Persephone, to seek the shade of Tiresias of Thebes, the blind seer, whose mind stays firm. To him in death Persephone has given mind, he alone unimpaired while the rest flit about as shades." That is exactly all, and in Canto 39 we see it on the page in Homer's very words. But eight cantos later we encounter it again, memorably paraphrased and amplified:

Who even dead, yet hath his mind entire!
This sound came in the dark
First must thou go the road
to hell
And to the bower of Ceres' daughter Proserpine,
Through overhanging dark, to see Tiresias,
Eyeless that was, a shade, that is in hell
So full of knowing that the beefy men know
less than he,
Ere thou come to thy road's end.
Knowledge the shade of a shade,
Yet must thou sail after knowledge
Knowing less than drugged beasts.
(C 236)

That seems to make sailing after knowledge a theme of the *Odyssey*, as it was certainly a theme for Ezra Pound. It has been recognizably a theme for Americans, in a country whose Enlightenment heritage sets knowing anything at all above not knowing it. (Never mind knowing what; there is an American book on how to win at Pac Man.) Quoting, in another connection, "Who even dead, yet hath his mind entire!" Pound hoped he had done sufficient homage to the Greek veneration of intelligence above brute force (GK 146).

Let us concede, though, that there is intelligence and intelligence, and credit Pound with having intended more than bric-à-brac knowingness. "Who even dead, yet hath his mind entire!" That resonant line is drawn from five words of Homer's, where "mind" is *phrenes*, the whole central part of the body, where you know that you are yourself and not a shade, and "entire" is *empedoi*, meaning firm on the foot, not slipping. Both are body-words: the midriff, the foot. The intelligence is in the body the way the meaning is in the ideogram: intrinsic and manifested, independent of lexicons, not deconstructible. To have merely one's "mind" entire is a later and less substantial concept. Pound lends it body as best he can with a weight of monosyllables and a stark contrast with how it is to be dead. Homer's word for how the dead flit about, *aissousin*, held his attention; it is a word he places on show twice in the *Thrones* cantos (C 675, 730). Disembodied, they have no minds; they flutter. If intelligence is in them, it is in the way it is in dictionaries.

("The trouble with the dictionary," Louis Zukofsky liked to say, "is that it keeps changing the subject.") A flitting, a fluttering: that was the Greek sense of disembodiment, and it fascinated Pound, and it was not intelligence. ("Butterflying around all the time," he said once, of aimless speculation. He was speaking of Richard of St. Victor's *cogitatio*, to be distinguished from *meditatio* and the highest thing, *contemplatio*.)

So we are learning how to take the stark physicality of the rites in the first canto, in particular how to take the need of the shades for blood. They need blood to get what is peculiar to the body, hence to the *phrenes*, the totally embodied intelligence. Without blood, the shades cannot so much as speak. Canto 1 draws on the part of the *Odyssey* Pound judged "older than the rest": Ronald Bush suggests he may have been following Cambridge anthropology here—the tradition of studies that, following on *The Golden Bough*, made Greek intuitions seem so much less cerebral than they had been for Flaxman and Arnold. Or—since I don't know whether he so much as read such a book as Jane Harrison's *Themis*—it is conceivable that in ascribing the underworld journey to "fore-time" he was trusting sheer intuition. It implies, anyhow, the Homeric sense of "intelligence," of "knowledge," something so remote from "ideas"—a word whose Greek credentials are post-Homeric—as to have drawn the snort, "Damn ideas, anyhow … poor two-dimensional stuff, a scant, scratch covering."

To sail after knowledge, then, is to seek what cannot be found in libraries, no, a wholeness of experience. I hope I have suggested that in weaving that phrase back from Dante into Homer, Pound was embellishing less than we may have thought. And it brought him to the superbly colloquial words of Zeus, who, admiring Odysseus, says (in Ezra Pound's English), "With a mind like that he is one of us". That consorts with a fact that has given scandal but need not, that Homer's gods are superbly physical, embodied. Odysseus, for such a god, is "one of us," precisely in having not a Ph.D. but *phrenes*: "the embodiment," said Pound's classmate Bill Williams, "of knowledge."

Having sailed a long circuit after the colloquial, we will not need a second for the other thing Pound wanted, "the magnificent onomatopoeia." Though "untranslated and untranslatable,"

para thina poluphloisboio thalasses

may serve as our terminal emblem: not boom rattle and buzz but the rare identity of words with whatever they signify, achieved with the signifying sound the way Chinese calligraphers achieved it with a signifying outline. Pound listened and heard the wave break, and in the sibilants of *thalasses* heard "the scutter of receding pebbles" (L 274): that whole mighty recurrent phenomenon incarnated in a few syllables represented by a few marks. The way into understanding this is like the way into understanding Homeric intelligence, something only there when it is embodied. So meanings are only there when the words embody them; otherwise, like the dead, they flutter, *aissousin*. And we are back, in a circle, to "the actual swing of words spoken," the other stamp that can authenticate language. Pound first encountered Homer through a man speaking: Mr. Spencer, at the Cheltenham Military Academy, the man "who first declaimed me the *Odyssey*," and was remembered for that after forty years.

Scholars now imagine an "oral-formulaic" Homer, a poet continually speaking, but speaking with the aid of formulae to fill out the meter. When Pound, aged eighty-four, heard an exposition of that, he responded that it did not explain "why Homer is so much better than everybody else." That was very nearly all that he said that day. Why Homer is so much better than everybody else is a thing there's no way to explain; nor why, having sailed after knowledge and turned astray, Ezra Pound should have fulfilled Dante's image with such precision: transmuted after so much eloquence into a tongue of flame, and a tongue that went silent.

Source: Hugh Kenner, "Pound and Homer," in *Ezra Pound Among the Poets*, edited by George Bornstein, University of Chicago Press, 1985, pp. 1-12.

Critical Essay #4

In his essay "Retrospect," Pound gives advice to new poets, detailing his opinions, approach, and ideas regarding the craft.

There has been so much scribbling about a new fashion in poetry, that I may perhaps be pardoned this brief recapitulation and retrospect.

In the spring or early summer of 1912, 'H. D.', Richard Aldington and myself decided that we were agreed upon the three principles following:

1. Direct treatment of the 'thing' whether subjective
or objective.
2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute
to the presentation.
3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence
of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome.

Upon many points of taste and of predilection we differed, but agreeing upon these three positions we thought we had as much right to a group name, at least as much right, as a number of French 'schools' proclaimed by Mr. Flint in the August number of Harold Monro's magazine for 1911.

This school has since been 'joined' or 'followed' by numerous people who, whatever their merits, do not show any signs of agreeing with the second specification. Indeed *vers libre* has become as prolix and as verbose as any of the flaccid varieties that preceded it. It has brought faults of its own. The actual language and phrasing is often as bad as that of our elders without even the excuse that the words are shovelled in to fill a metric pattern or to complete the noise of a rhyme-sound. Whether or no the phrases followed by the followers are musical must be left to the reader's decision. At times I can find a marked metre in 'vers libres', as stale and hackneyed as any pseudo-Swinburnian, at times the writers seem to follow no musical structure whatever. But it is, on the whole, good that the field should be ploughed. Perhaps a few good poems have come from the new method, and if so it is justified.

Criticism is not a circumscription or a set of prohibitions. It provides fixed points of departure. It may startle a dull reader into alertness. That little of it which is good is mostly in stray phrases; or if it be an older artist helping a younger it is in great measure but rules of thumb, cautions gained by experience.

I set together a few phrases on practical working about the time the first remarks on imagisme were published. The first use of the word 'Imagiste' was in my note to T. E. Hulme's five poems, printed at the end of my 'Ripostes' in the autumn of 1912. I reprint my cautions from *Poetry* for March, 1913.

A Few Don'ts

An 'Image' is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. I use the term 'complex' rather in the technical sense employed by the newer psychologists, such as Hart, though we might not agree absolutely in our application.

It is the presentation of such a 'complex' instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art.

It is better to present one Image in a lifetime than to produce voluminous works.

All this, however, some may consider open to debate. The immediate necessity is to tabulate A LIST OF DON'TS for those beginning to write verses. I can not put all of them into Mosaic negative.

To begin with, consider the three propositions (demanding direct treatment, economy of words, and the sequence of the musical phrase), not as dogma—never consider anything as dogma—but as the result of long contemplation, which, even if it is some one else's contemplation, may be worth consideration.

Pay no attention to the criticism of men who have never themselves written a notable work. Consider the discrepancies between the actual writing of the Greek poets and dramatists, and the theories of the Graeco-Roman grammarians, concocted to explain their metres.

Language

Use no superfluous word, no adjective which does not reveal something.

Don't use such an expression as 'dim lands *of peace*'. It dulls the image. It mixes an abstraction with the concrete. It comes from the writer's not realizing that the natural object is always the *adequate* symbol.

Go in fear of abstractions. Do not retell in mediocre verse what has already been done in good prose. Don't think any intelligent person is going to be deceived when you try to shirk all the difficulties of the unspeakably difficult art of good prose by chopping your composition into line lengths.

What the expert is tired of today the public will be tired of tomorrow.

Don't imagine that the art of poetry is any simpler than the art of music, or that you can please the expert before you have spent at least as much effort on the art of verse as the average piano teacher spends on the art of music.

Be influenced by as many great artists as you can, but have the decency either to acknowledge the debt outright, or to try to conceal it.

Don't allow 'influence' to mean merely that you mop up the particular decorative vocabulary of some one or two poets whom you happen to admire. A Turkish war correspondent was recently caught red-handed babbling in his despatches of 'dovegrey' hills, or else it was 'pearl-pale', I can not remember.

Use either no ornament or good ornament.

Rhythm and Rhyme

Let the candidate fill his mind with the finest cadences he can discover, preferably in a foreign language, so that the meaning of the words may be less likely to divert his attention from the movement; e.g. Saxon charms, Hebridean Folk Songs, the verse of Dante, and the lyrics of Shakespeare— if he can dissociate the vocabulary from the cadence. Let him dissect the lyrics of Goethe coldly into their component sound values, syllables long and short, stressed and unstressed, into vowels and consonants.

It is not necessary that a poem should rely on its music, but if it does rely on its music that music must be such as will delight the expert.

Let the neophyte know assonance and alliteration, rhyme immediate and delayed, simple and polyphonic, as a musician would expect to know harmony and counterpoint and all the minutiae of his craft. No time is too great to give to these matters or to any one of them, even if the artist seldom have need of them.

Don't imagine that a thing will 'go' in verse just because it's too dull to go in prose.

Don't be 'viewy'—leave that to the writers of pretty little philosophic essays. Don't be descriptive; remember that the painter can describe a landscape much better than you can, and that he has to know a deal more about it.

When Shakespeare talks of the 'Dawn in russet mantle clad' he presents something which the painter does not present. There is in this line of his nothing that one can call description; he presents.

Consider the way of the scientists rather than the way of an advertising agent for a new soap.

The scientist does not expect to be acclaimed as a great scientist until he has *discovered* something. He begins by learning what has been discovered already. He goes from that point onward. He does not bank on being a charming fellow personally. He does not expect his friends to applaud the results of his freshman class work. Freshmen in poetry are unfortunately not confined to a definite and recognizable class room. They are 'all over the shop'. Is it any wonder 'the public is indifferent to poetry?'

Don't chop your stuff into separate *iambs.* Don't make each line stop dead at the end, and then begin every next line with a heave. Let the beginning of the next line catch the rise of the rhythm wave, unless you want a definite longish pause.

In short, behave as a musician, a good musician, when dealing with that phase of your art which has exact parallels in music. The same laws govern, and you are bound by no others.

Naturally, your rhythmic structure should not destroy the shape of your words, or their natural sound, or their meaning. It is improbable that, at the start, you will be able to get a rhythm-structure strong enough to affect them very much, though you may fall a victim to all sorts of false stopping due to line ends and cæsurae.

The Musician can rely on pitch and the volume of the orchestra. You can not. The term harmony is misapplied in poetry; it refers to simultaneous sounds of different pitch. There is, however, in the best verse a sort of residue of sound which remains in the ear of the hearer and acts more or less as an organ-base.

A rhyme must have in it some slight element of surprise if it is to give pleasure; it need not be bizarre or curious, but it must be well used if used at all.

Vide further Vildrac and Duhamel's notes on rhyme in '*Technique Poétique*'.

That part of your poetry which strikes upon the imaginative *eye* of the reader will lose nothing by translation into a foreign tongue; that which appeals to the ear can reach only those who take it in the original.

Consider the definiteness of Dante's presentation, as compared with Milton's rhetoric. Read as much of Wordsworth as does not seem too unutterably dull.

If you want the gist of the matter go to Sappho, Catullus, Villon, Heine when he is in the vein, Gautier when he is not too frigid; or, if you have not the tongues, seek out the leisurely Chaucer. Good prose will do you no harm, and there is good discipline to be had by trying to write it.

Translation is likewise good training, if you find that your original matter 'wobbles' when you try to rewrite it. The meaning of the poem to be translated can not 'wobble'.

If you are using a symmetrical form, don't put in what you want to say and then fill up the remaining vacuums with slush.

Don't mess up the perception of one sense by trying to define it in terms of another. This is usually only the result of being too lazy to find the exact word. To this clause there are possibly exceptions.

The first three simple prescriptions will throw out nine-tenths of all the bad poetry now accepted as standard and classic; and will prevent you from many a crime of production.

'… Mais d'abord il faut être un poète', as MM. Duhamel and Vildrac have said at the end of their little book, *'Notes sur la Technique Poétique.'*

Since March 1913, Ford Madox Hueffer has pointed out that Wordsworth was so intent on the ordinary or plain word that he never thought of hunting for *le mot juste.*

John Butler Yeats has handled or man-handled Wordsworth and the Victorians, and his criticism, contained in letters to his son, is now printed and available.

I do not like writing *about* art, my first, at least I think it was my first essay on the subject, was a protest against it.

Prolegomena

Time was when the poet lay in a green field with his head against a tree and played his diversion on a ha'penny whistle, and Caesar's predecessors conquered the earth, and the predecessors of golden Crassus embezzled, and fashions had their say, and let him alone. And presumably he was fairly content in this circumstance, for I have small doubt that the occasional passerby, being attracted by curiosity to know why any one should lie under a tree and blow diversion on a ha'penny whistle, came and conversed with him, and that among these passers-by there was on occasion a person of charm or a young lady who had not read *Man and Superman*; and looking back upon this naïve state of affairs we call it the age of gold.

Metastasio, and he should know if any one, assures us that this age endures—even though the modern poet is expected to holloa his verses down a speaking tube to the editors of cheap magazines—S. S. McClure, or some one of that soft— even though hordes of authors meet in dreariness and drink healths to the 'Copyright Bill'; even though these things be, the age of gold pertains. Imperceivably, if you like, but pertains. You meet unkempt Amyclas in a Soho restaurant and chant together of dead and forgotten things—it is a manner of speech among poets to chant of dead, halfforgotten things, there seems no special harm in it; it has always been done—and it's rather better to be a clerk in the Post Office than to look after a lot of stinking, verminous sheep—and at another hour of the day one substitutes the drawing-room for the restaurant and tea is probably more palatable than mead and mare's milk, and little cakes than honey. And in this fashion one survives the resignation of Mr Balfour, and the iniquities of the American customs-house, *e quel bufera infernal*, the periodical press. And then in the middle of it, there being apparently no other person at once capable and available one is stopped and asked to explain oneself.

I begin on the chord thus querulous, for I would much rather lie on what is left of Catullus' parlour floor and speculate the azure beneath it and the hills off to Salo and Riva with their forgotten gods moving unhindered amongst them, than discuss any processes and theories of art whatsoever. I would rather play tennis. I shall not argue.

Credo

Rhythm.—I believe in an 'absolute rhythm', a rhythm, that is, in poetry which corresponds exactly to the emotion or shade of emotion to be expressed. A man's rhythm must be interpretative, it will be, therefore, in the end, his own, uncounterfeiting, uncounterfeitable.

Symbols.—I believe that the proper and perfect symbol is the natural object, that if a man use 'symbols' he must so use them that their symbolic function does not obtrude; so that *a* sense, and the poetic quality of the passage, is not lost to those who do not understand the symbol as such, to whom, for instance, a hawk is a hawk.

Technique.—I believe in technique as the test of a man's sincerity; in law when it is ascertainable; in the trampling down of every convention that impedes or obscures the determination of the law, or the precise rendering of the impulse.

Form.—I think there is a 'fluid' as well as a 'solid' content, that some poems may have form as a tree has form, some as water poured into a vase. That most symmetrical forms have certain uses. That a vast number of subjects cannot be precisely, and therefore not properly rendered in symmetrical forms.

'Thinking that alone worthy wherein the whole art is employed'. I think the artist should master all known forms and systems of metric, and I have with some persistence set about doing this, searching particularly into those periods wherein the systems came to birth or attained their maturity. It has been complained, with some justice, that I dump my note-books on the public. I think that only after a long struggle will poetry attain such a degree of development, or, if you will, modernity, that it will vitally concern people who are accustomed, in prose, to Henry James and Anatole France, in music to Debussy. I am constantly contending that it took two centuries of Provence and one of Tuscany to develop the media of Dante's masterwork, that it took the latinists of the Renaissance, and the Pleiade, and his own age of painted speech to prepare Shakespeare his tools. It is tremendously important that great poetry be written, it makes no jot of difference who writes it. The experimental demonstrations of one man may save the time of many — hence my furore over Arnaut Daniel—if a man's experiments try out one new rime, or dispense conclusively with one iota of currently accepted nonsense, he is merely playing fair with his colleagues when he chalks up his result.

No man ever writes very much poetry that 'matters'. In bulk, that is, no one produces much that is final, and when a man is not doing this highest thing, this saying the thing once for all and perfectly; when he is not matching . . . 'Hist—said Kate the Queen', he had much better be making the sorts of experiment which may be of use to him in his later work, or to his successors.

'The lyf so short, the craft so long to lerne.' It is a foolish thing for a man to begin his work on a too narrow foundation, it is a disgraceful thing for a man's work not to show steady growth and increasing fineness from first to last.

As for 'adaptations'; one finds that all the old masters of painting recommend to their pupils that they begin by copying masterwork, and proceed to their own composition.

As for 'Every man his own poet', the more every man knows about poetry the better. I believe in every one writing poetry who wants to; most do. I believe in every man knowing enough of music to play 'God bless our home' on the harmonium, but I do not believe in every man giving concerts and printing his sin.

The mastery of any art is the work of a lifetime. I should not discriminate between the 'amateur' and the 'professional'. Or rather I should discriminate quite often in favour of the amateur, but I should discriminate between the amateur and the expert. It is certain that the present chaos will endure until the Art of poetry has been preached down the amateur gullet, until there is such a general understanding of the fact that poetry is an art and not a pastime; such a knowledge of technique; of technique of surface and technique of content, that the amateurs will cease to try to drown out the masters.

If a certain thing was said once for all in Atlantis or Arcadia, in 450 Before Christ or in 1290 after, it is not for us moderns to go saying it over, or to go obscuring the memory of the dead by saying the same thing with less skill and less conviction.

My pawing over the ancients and semi-ancients has been one struggle to find out what has been done, once for all, better than it can ever be done again, and to find out what remains for us to do, and plenty does remain, for if we still feel the same emotions as those which launched the thousand ships, it is quite certain that we come on these feelings differently, through different nuances, by different intellectual gradations. Each age has its own abounding gifts yet only some ages transmute them into matter of duration. No good poetry is ever written in a manner twenty years old, for to write in such a manner shows conclusively that the writer thinks from books, convention and *cliché,* and not from life, yet a man feeling the divorce of life and his art may naturally try to resurrect a forgotten mode if he finds in that mode some leaven, or if he think he sees in it some element lacking in contemporary art which might unite that art again to its sustenance, life.

In the art of Daniel and Cavalcanti, I have seen that precision which I miss in the Victorians, that explicit rendering, be it of external nature, or of emotion. Their testimony is of the eyewitness, their symptoms are first hand.

As for the nineteenth century, with all respect to its achievements, I think we shall look back upon it as a rather blurry, messy sort of a period, a rather sentimentalistic, mannerish sort of a period. I say this without any self-righteousness, with no selfsatisfaction.

As for there being a 'movement' or my being of it, the conception of poetry as a 'pure art' in the sense in which I use the term, revived with Swinburne. From the puritanical revolt to Swinburne, poetry had been merely the vehicle—yes, definitely, Arthur Symon's scruples and feelings about the word not withholding—the ox-cart and postchaise for transmitting thoughts poetic or otherwise. And perhaps the 'great Victorians', though it is doubtful, and assuredly the 'nineties' continued the development of the art, confining their improvements, however, chiefly to sound and to refinements of manner.

Mr Yeats has once and for all stripped English poetry of its perdamnable rhetoric. He has boiled away all that is not poetic—and a good deal that is. He has become a classic in his own lifetime and *nel mezzo del cammin*. He has made our poetic idiom a thing pliable, a speech without inversions.

Robert Bridges, Maurice Hewlett and Frederic Manning are in their different ways seriously concerned with overhauling the metric, in testing the language and its adaptability to certain modes. Ford Hueffer is making some sort of experiments in modernity. The Provost of Oriel continues his translation of the *Divina Commedia*.

As to Twentieth century poetry, and the poetry which I expect to see written during the next decade or so, it will, I think, move against poppy-cock, it will be harder and saner, it will be what Mr Hewlett calls 'nearer the bone'. It will be as much like granite as it can be, its force will lie in its truth, its interpretative power (of course, poetic force does always rest there); I mean it will not try to seem forcible by rhetorical din, and luxurious riot. We will have fewer painted adjectives impeding the shock and stroke of it. At least for myself, I want it so, austere, direct, free from emotional slither.

What is there now, in 1917, to be added?

Re Vers Libre

I think the desire for vers libre is due to the sense of quantity reasserting itself after years of starvation. But I doubt if we can take over, for English, the rules of quantity laid down for Greek and Latin, mostly by Latin grammarians.

I think one should write vers libre only when one 'must', that is to say, only when the 'thing' builds up a rhythm more beautiful than that of set metres, or more real, more a part of the emotion of the 'thing', more germane, intimate, interpretative than the measure of regular accentual verse; a rhythm which discontents one with set iambic or set anapaestic.

Eliot has said the thing very well when he said, 'No *vers* is *libre* for the man who wants to do a good job.'

As a matter of detail, there is vers libre with accent heavily marked as a drum-beat (as par example my 'Dance Figure'), and on the other hand I think I have gone as far as can profitably be gone in the other direction (and perhaps too far). I mean I do not think one can use to any advantage rhythms much more tenuous and imperceptible than some I have used. I think progress lies rather in an attempt to approximate classical quantitative metres (NOT to copy them) than in a carelessness regarding such things.

I agree with John Yeats on the relation of beauty to certitude. I prefer satire, which is due to emotion, to any sham of emotion.

I have had to write, or at least I have written a good deal about art, sculpture, painting and poetry. I have seen what seemed to me the best of contemporary work reviled and obstructed. Can any one write prose of permanent or durable interest when he is merely saying for one year what nearly every one will say at the end of three or four years? I have been battistrada for a sculptor, a painter, a novelist, several poets. I wrote also of certain French writers in *The New Age* in nineteen twelve or eleven.

I would much rather that people would look at Brzeska's sculpture and Lewis's drawings, and that they would read Joyce, Jules Romains, Eliot, than that they should read what I have said of these men, or that I should be asked to republish argumentative essays and reviews.

All that the critic can do for the reader or audience or spectator is to focus his gaze or audition. Rightly or wrongly I think my blasts and essays have done their work, and that more people are now likely to go to the sources than are likely to read this book.

Jammes's 'Existences' in '*La Triomphe de la Vie*' is available. So are his early poems. I think we need a convenient anthology rather than descriptive criticism. Carl Sandburg wrote me from Chicago, 'It's hell when poets can't afford to buy each other's books.' Half the people who care, only borrow. In America so few people know each other that the difficulty lies more than half in distribution. Perhaps one should make an anthology: Romains's 'Un Etre en Marche' and 'Prières', Vildrac's 'Visite'. Retrospectively the fine wrought work of Laforgue, the flashes of Rimbaud, the hardbit lines of Tristan Corbière, Tailhade's sketches in 'Poèmes Aristophanesques', the 'Litanies' of De Gourmont.

It is difficult at all times to write of the fine arts, it is almost impossible unless one can accompany one's prose with many reproductions. Still I would seize this chance or any chance to reaffirm my belief in Wyndham Lewis's genius, both in his drawings and his writings. And I would name an out of the way prose book, the '*Scenes and Portraits* ' of Frederic Manning, as well as James Joyce's short stories and novel, 'Dubliners' and the now well known 'Portrait of the Artist' as well as Lewis' 'Tarr', if, that is, I may treat my strange reader as if he were a new friend come into the room, intent on ransacking my bookshelf.

Only Emotion Endures

'Only emotion endures.' Surely it is better for me to name over the few beautiful poems that still ring in my head than for me to search my flat for back numbers of periodicals and rearrange all that I have said about friendly and hostile writers.

The first twelve lines of Padraic Colum's 'Drover'; his 'O Woman shapely as a swan, on your account I shall not die'; Joyce's 'I hear an army'; the lines of Yeats that ring in my head and in the heads of all young men of my time who care for poetry: Braseal and the Fisherman, 'The fire that stirs about her when she stirs'; the later lines of 'The Scholars', the faces of the Magi; William Carlos Williams's 'Postlude', Aldington's version of 'Atthis', and 'H. D.'s' waves like pine tops, and her verse in 'Des Imagistes' the first anthology; Hueffer's 'How red your lips are' in his translation from Von der Vogelweide, his 'Three Ten', the general effect of his 'On Heaven'; his sense of the prose values or prose qualities in poetry; his ability to write poems that half-chant and are spoiled by a musician's additions; beyond these a poem by Alice Corbin, 'One City Only', and another ending 'But sliding water over a stone'. These things have worn smooth in my head and I am not through with them, nor with Aldington's 'In Via Sestina' nor his other poems in 'Des Imagistes', though people have told me their flaws. It may be that their content is too much embedded in me for me to look back at the words.

I am almost a different person when I come to take up the argument for Eliot's poems.

Source: T. S. Eliot, "A Retrospect," in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, edited by T. S. Eliot, New Directions, 1965, pp. 3-14.

Critical Essay #5

In the following essay, M. L. Rosenthal discusses Pound's Cantos *as a work that must be read "experientially" rather than "schematically" and how this reading exposes its historical scope and its multiple voices.*

Space forbids our going into the *Cantos* in even as much detail as we have into *Mauberley*. We have already, however, noted some of the leading ideas behind this more involved and ambitious work, and though we cannot here trace their handling throughout its winning, Gargantuan progress, a few suggestions concerning its character as a poetic sequence may be useful. First of all, we may take as our point of departure the fact that in motivation and outlook the *Cantos* are a vast proliferation from the same conceptions which underlie *Mauberley*. The difference lies partly in the multiplicity of "voices" and "cross-sections," partly in the vastly greater inclusiveness of historical and cultural scope, and partly in the unique formal quality of the longer sequence; it is by the very nature of its growth over the years a work-in-progress. Even when the author at last brings it to conclusion, reorganizing it, supplying the withheld Cantos 72 and 73, completing his revisions, and even giving his book a definitive title, it will remain such a work. Each group of cantos will be what it is now—a new *phase* of the poem, like each of the annual rings of a living tree. The poet has put his whole creative effort into a mobilization of all levels of his consciousness into the service of the *Cantos*; there has been a driving central continuity, and around it new clusters of knowledge and association linked with the others by interweavings, repetitions, and overall perspective. Pound has staked most of his adult career as a poet on this most daring of poetic enterprises; literary history gives us few other examples of comparable commitment.

The *Cantos* has been called Pound's "intellectual diary since 1915," and so it is. But the materials of this diary have been so arranged as to subserve the aims of the poem itself. Passage by passage there *is* the fascination of listening in on a learned, passionate, now rowdy, now delicate intelligence, an intelligence peopled by the figures of living tradition but not so possessed by them that it cannot order their appearances and relationships. Beyond the fascination of the surface snatches of song, dialogue, and description, always stimulating and rhythmically suggestive though not always intelligible upon first reading, there is the essential overriding drive of the poem, and the large pattern of its overlapping layers of thought. The way in which the elements of this pattern swim into the reader's line of vision is well suggested by Hugh Kenner, one of Pound's most able and enthusiastic interpreters:

The word "periplum," which recurs continually
throughout the *Pisan Cantos* [74-84], is glossed
in Canto LIX:
periplum, not as land looks on a map
but as sea bord seen by men sailing.

Victor Brerard discovered that the geography of the *Odyssey*, grotesque when referred to a map, was minutely accurate according to the Phoenician voyagers' *periploi*. The image of successive discoveries breaking upon the consciousness of the voyager is one of Pound's central themes.… The voyage of Odysseus to hell is the matter of Canto I. The first half of Canto XL is a periplum through the financial press; "out of which things seeking an exit," we take up in the second half of the Canto the narrative of the Carthagenian Hanno's voyage of discovery. Atlantic flights in the same way raise the world of epileptic maggots in Canto XXVIII into a sphere of swift firm-hearted discovery. … The periplum, the voyage of discovery among facts,… is everywhere contrasted with the conventions and artificialities of the bird's eye view afforded by the map.…

Thus, the successive cantos and layers of cantos must be viewed not so much schematically as experientially. Here we see how the early Pound's developing idealization of the concrete image, the precise phrase, the organically accurate rhythm are now brought to bear on this vast later task. The many voices, varied scenes and *personae*, and echoes of other languages and literatures than English reflect this emphasis on experience itself: something mysterious, untranslatable, the embodied meaning of life which we generalize only at peril of losing touch with it. So also with Pound's emphatic use of Chinese ideograms, whose picture-origins still are visible enough, he believes, so that to "read" them is to think in images rather than in abstractions. His use of them is accounted for by the same desire to present "successive discoveries breaking upon the consciousness of the voyager." The first effect of all these successive, varied breakings is not intended to be total intellectual understanding, any more than in real experience we "understand" situations upon first coming into them. But by and by the pattern shapes up and the relationships clarify themselves, though always there remains an unresolved residue of potentiality for change, intractable and baffling.

Pound's "voyager," upon whose consciousness the discoveries break, is, we have several times observed, a composite figure derived first of all from the poet-speaker's identification with Odysseus. A hero of myth and epic, he is yet very much of this world. He is both the result of creative imagination and its embodiment. He explores the worlds of the living, of the dead, and of the mythic beings of Hades and Paradise. Lover of mortal women as of female deities, he is like Zagreus a symbol of the life-bringing male force whose mission does not end even with his return to his homeland. Gradually he becomes all poets and all heroes who have somehow vigorously impregnated the culture. He undergoes (as do the female partners of his procreation and the *personae* and locales in time and space of the whole sequence) many metamorphoses. Hence the importance of the Ovidian metamorphosis involving the god Dionysus, the sea (the female element and symbol of change), and the intermingling of contemporary colloquial idiom and the high style of ancient poetry in Canto 2. The first canto had ended with a burst of praise for Aphrodite, goddess of love and beauty, and in language suggesting the multiple allusiveness of the sequence: to the Latin and Renaissance traditions, as well as the Grecian-Homeric, and to the cross-cultural implications suggested by the phrase "golden bough." The second canto takes us swiftly backward in the poetic tradition, through Browning, then Sordello and the other troubadours, and

then to the classical poets and the Chinese tradition. All poets are one, as Helen and Eleanor of Aquitaine and Tyro (beloved of Poseidon) and all femininity are one and all heroes are one.

In the first two cantos, then, the "periplum" of the sequence emerges into view. Three main valuereferents are established: a sexually and aesthetically creative world-view, in which artistic and mythical tradition provides the main axes; the worship of Bacchus-Dionysus-Zagreus as the best symbol of creativity in action; and the multiple hero—poet, voyager, prophet, observer, thinker. The next four cantos expand the range of allusiveness, introducing for instance the figure of the Cid, a chivalric hero, to add his dimension to the voyager-protagonist's consciousness. Also, various tragic tales are brought to mind, extending the initial horror of Odysseus' vision of the dead and thus contributing to the larger scheme of the poet in the modern wasteland. In absolute contrast, pagan beatitudes are clearly projected in Canto 2 in the pictures of Poseidon and Tyro:

Twisted arms of the sea-god,
Lithe sinews of water, gripping her, cross-hold,
And the blue-gray glass of the wave tents them.

and, at the scene's close, in the phallic "tower like a one-eyed great goose" craning up above the olive grove while the fauns are heard "chiding Proteus" and the frogs "singing against the fauns." This pagan ideal comes in again and again, sharp and stabbing against bleak backgrounds like the "petals on the wet, black bough" of the "Metro" poem. Thus, in Canto 3:

Gods float in the azure air,
Bright gods and Tuscan, back before dew
was shed.

In Canto 4:
Choros nympharum, goat-foot, with the pale foot
alternate;
Crescent of blue-shot waters, green-gold in
the shallows,
A black cock crows in the sea-foam….

In 4 and 5 both there are deliberate echoes of such poets as have a kindred vision (Catullus, Sappho, and others), set against the notes of evil and damnation. The lines from Sordello in 6 serve the same purpose:

"Winter and Summer I sing of her grace,
As the rose is fair, so fair is her face,
Both Summer and Winter I sing of her,
The snow makyth me to remember her."

The Lady of the troubadours, whose "grace" is a secularized transposition from that of Deity, is another manifestation of "the body of nymphs, of nymphs, and Diana" which Actaeon saw, as well as of what Catullus meant: " 'Nuces!' praise, and Hymenaeus 'brings the girl to her man.…'"

After these archetypal and literary points of reference have been established, Cantos 8-19 move swiftly into a close-up of the origins of the modern world in the Renaissance, and of the victory of the anticreative over the active, humanistic values represented by Sigismundo Malatesta and a few others. (Canto 7 is transitional; in any case we can note only the larger groupings here.) The relation between the "Renaissance Cantos" (8-11) and the "Hell Cantos" (14-16), with their scatological picturings of the contemporary Inferno, is organic: the beginning and the end of the same process of social corruption. The beautiful dialogue on order in 13 provides a calm, contrasting center for this portion of the sequence, and is supported by the paradisic glow and serenity of Elysium, revealed in 16 and 17. The earlier cantos had given momentary attention to Oriental poetry and myth and, as we have seen, Elysian glimpses also. Now these motifs are expanded and related to a new context, bringing the sequence into revised focus but carrying all its earlier associations along. This leaping, reshuffling, and reordering is the organizational principle behind the growth, the "annual rings," of the *Cantos*.

The next ten cantos interweave the motifs of these first two groups and prepare us for the next leap (in Cantos 30-41) of perspective. There are various preparations for this leap, even as early as Canto 20, in which there is a moment of comment from the "outside" as if to take stock before hurtling onward. From their remote "shelf," "aerial, cut in the aether," the disdainful lotus-eaters question all purposeful effort:

"What gain with Odysseus,
"They that died in the whirlpool
"And after many vain labours,
"Living by stolen meat, chained to the rowingbench,
"That he should have a great fame
"And lie by night with the goddess?…"

Is the question wisdom or cynicism? No matter. The poem, given the human condition and the epic tasks that grow out of it, is held in check but an instant before again plunging ahead. The *Cantos* accepts the moral meaning and the moral responsibility of human consciousness. The heroic ideal remains, as on the other hand the evil of our days remains even after the goddess' song against pity is heard at the beginning of 30.

The new group (30-41) is, like the later Adams cantos (62-71), in the main a vigorous attempt to present the fundamental social and economic principles of the Founding Fathers as identical with Pound's own. Adams and Jefferson are his particular heroes, and there is an effort to show that Mussolini's program is intended to carry these basic principles, imbedded in the Constitution but perverted by banking interests, into action.

Pound works letters and other documents, as well as conversations real and imagined, into his blocks of verse, usually fragmentarily, and gives modern closeups of business manipulations. The method has the effect of a powerful exposé, particularly of the glimpsed operations of munitions-profiteers. The cantos of the early 1930's have, indeed, a direct connection with the interest in social and historical documentation and rhetoric that marks much other work of the same period, and at the end of Canto 41 (in which Mussolini is seen) we should not be surprised to find an oratorical climax similar in effect to that of Poem IV in *Mauberley* (1919). As in the earlier groups, however, we are again given contrasting centers of value, especially in Canto 36 (which renders Cavalcanti's *A lady asks me*) and in Canto 39, whose sexually charged interpretation of the spell cast over Odysseus and his men on Circe's isle is one of Pound's purest successes.

The Chinese cantos (53-61) and the Pisan group (74-84) are the two most important remaining unified clusters within the larger scheme. Again, the practical idealism of Confucianism, like that of Jefferson and Adams, becomes an analogue for Pound's own ideas of order and of secular aestheticism. Canto 13 was a clear precursor, setting the poetic stage for this later extension. "Order" and "brotherly deference" are key words in Confucius' teachings; both princes and ordinary men must have order *within* them, each in his own way, if dominion and family alike are to thrive. These thoughts are not clichés as Pound presents them. We hear a colloquy that has passion, humor, and depth, and what our society would certainly consider unorthodoxy. Kung "said nothing of the 'life after death,'" he considered loyalty to family and friends a prior claim to that of the law, he showed no respect for the aged when they were ignorant through their own fault, and he advocated a return to the times "when the historians left blanks in their writings, / I mean for things they didn't know." The Chinese cantos view Chinese history in the light of these principles of ordered intelligence in action, with the ideogram *ching ming* (name things accurately) at the heart of the identity between Confucian and Poundian attitudes. "The great virtue of the Chinese language," writes Hugh Gordon Porteus, "inheres in its written characters, which so often contrive to suggest by their graphic gestures (as English does by its phonetic gestures) the very essence of what is to be conveyed." The development of Pound's interest in Chinese poetry and thought, as well as his varied translations from the Chinese, is in itself an important subject. This interest, like every other to which he has seriously turned his attention, he has brought directly to bear on his own poetic practice and on his highly activistic thinking in general.

With the *Pisan Cantos* and *Rock-Drill* we are brought, .rst, into the immediately contemporary world of the poet himself, in Fascist Italy toward the close of World War II, in a concentration camp at Pisa, during the last days of Mussolini; and second, into a great, summarizing recapitulation of rootattitudes developed in all the preceding cantos: in particular the view of the banking system as a scavenger and breeder of corruption, and of ancient Chinese history as an illuminating, often wholesomely contrasting analogue to that of the postmedieval West. Even more than before, we see now how the *Cantos* descend, with some bastardies along the line, from the Enlightenment. They conceive of a world creatively ordered to serve human needs, a largely rationalist conception. Hence the stress on the sanity of Chinese thought, the immediacy of the Chinese ideogram, and the hardheaded realism of a certain strain of economic theory.

The *Pisan Cantos* show Pound's vivid responsiveness as he approached and passed his sixtieth birthday; his aliveness to people his Rabelaisian humor, his compassion. The lotus-eaters of Canto 20, aloof and disdainful, have missed out on the main chances. Canto 81 contains the famous "Pull down thy vanity" passage in which the poet, though rebuking his own egotism, yet staunchly insists on the meaningfulness of his accomplishment and ideals. As the sequence approaches conclusion, the fragments are shored together for the moral summing-up. In the *Rock-Drill* section, Cantos 85-95, the stocktaking continues and we are promised, particularly in Canto 90, an even fuller revelation than has yet been vouchsafed us of the Earthly Paradise.

Cantos 96-109 begin to carry out this promise, though after so many complexities, overlappings, and interlocking voices it must be nearly impossible to bring the work to an end. It is essentially a selfrenewing process rather than a classical structure, and there is no limit to the aspects of history and thought the poet has wished to bring to bear on the poem. Canto 96, for instance, touches on certain developments after the fall of Rome, especially two decrees in the Eastern Empire by Justinian and Leo VI concerning standards of trade, workmanship, and coinage. The special emphasis in this canto on Byzantine civilization is particularly appropriate because of Byzantium's historical and geographical uniting of East and West as well as its mystical associations pointing to a new and dramatic paradisic vision. Although the memory of earlier glimpses of "paradise" and the recapitulative, self-interrupting method militate against an effect of a revelation overwhelmingly new, the pacing of the whole sequence has made this difficulty at the end inevitable. Pound's conclusion must be introduced as emergent from the midst of things, still struggling from all in life and consciousness that makes for disorder.

Source: M. L. Rosenthal, "The Cantos," in *A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Walter Sutton, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963.

Media Adaptations

In 1958, Pound was released from St. Elizabeth's hospital in Washington, D.C. Before leaving the United States to return to Italy, Pound agreed to be recorded for an audio record. The Caedmon record label produced two records of *Ezra Pound Reading His Poetry*, both of which have extensive selections from *The Cantos*.

Topics for Further Study

In many of the middle cantos, Pound focuses on the correspondence between Thomas Jefferson and John Adams. He is also interested in the establishment of the first and second Banks of the United States, and on how these two early presidents clashed with Alexander Hamilton on economic policy. What was the purpose of the Bank of the U.S.? What were Jefferson's and Adams' opinions of it? What is Pound's opinion?

Beginning in Canto 13, Pound examines the thought of the ancient Chinese philosopher Kung Fu-tse, or Confucius. What are some important Confucian ideas? How has Confucianism influenced Chinese society over the centuries? What is the current Chinese government's attitude toward Confucian thought?

Ezra Pound greatly admired the Italian dictator, Benito Mussolini, and Mussolini makes appearances in *The Cantos*. What was Mussolini's government like? How did he rise to power? What relationship was there between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany in the 1930s and 1940s?

An important cultural moment for Pound, one that informed the conception of *The Cantos*, is the Provencal or troubadour culture. Where did these people live? What language did they speak? How was their society organized? What does the word "troubadour" mean?

Compare & Contrast

1920s: The United States, fresh from its success in World War I, enjoys the "Roaring Twenties," a period of economic expansion and artistic experimentation. Many prominent American artists and writers, though, are living in Paris, fleeing what they see as American bourgeois provincialism.

1990s: The United States enjoys an unprecedented period of economic expansion and the creation of wealth. During these years, however, many experimental artists find themselves in conflict with conservative American values. Such artists as Robert Mapplethorpe, Karen Finley, Andres Serrano, and Chris Ofili see their esoteric, avant-garde work become the subject of impassioned public debate because of its perceived immorality or blasphemy.

1930s: Europe sees the rise of fascist, militarydominated states such as Spain, Italy, and Germany. America remains "isolationist," tending to its own affairs, while Americans in Europe warn of an impending conflict.

2000: After the fall of the Soviet empire, the former Eastern Bloc states create their own destinies. Some, like the Czech Republic and Poland, are stable and improve their citizens' economic lives. Others, such as Yugoslavia, break apart. In 1999, the United States gets involved in an ethnic conflict in the former Yugoslavia, bombing targets in Serbia in an effort to convince the Serbian leader to end his war on the people of Kosovo.

1940s: World War II, the greatest and most destructive conflict the world has ever seen, kills millions. Europe, Japan, and much of the South Pacific and Southeast Asia are devastated. In response, the victorious powers help the defeated nations rebuild, but dictate the rebuilding of the political systems of their former foes.

2000: The United States, NATO, and the UN keep their eyes on two nations: Iraq and Serbia. Each of these countries was recently defeated in military action by the United States and its allies, but neither fully capitulated, and the countries regard each other with wary hostility.

What Do I Read Next?

Pound's earlier and shorter poetry is collected in the volume entitled *Personae*. Although none of the poems in this book were written after 1920, they give an important introduction to the methods that *The Cantos* use: the centrality of the image, free verse, and the speaking voice. In addition, many of the poems prefigure the themes that Pound addresses more expansively in *The Cantos*.

In the *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* and *Ezra Pound: Selected Prose 1909-1965*, the New Directions publishing house collected almost all of Pound's important writings on literary, political, and economic topics. (Pound was such a prolific writer that a collection of all of his writings would fill dozens of books.) The *Literary Essays* contain important statements that illuminate Pound's use of the image and his opinions of literary predecessors. *Selected Prose*, by contrast, includes many of Pound's most controversial statements on politics and economics.

Pound got most of his ideas about the power of Chinese and Japanese poetry from the short book *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry* by Ernest Fenollosa. This book deeply influenced the composition of *The Cantos*, even if many of Fenollosa's ideas have been shown to be wrong.

If *The Cantos* were only a moderate success critically, a poem that Pound helped author was his greatest public success. T. S. Eliot's poem "The Waste Land" was a sprawling mass of observations when Eliot gave the poem to Pound to edit. Pound cut almost four-fifths of the poem and suggested a number of changes—most importantly, changing the name from "He Do The Police In Different Voices"—that should qualify him as Eliot's co-author.

Stephen Kern's scholarly study *The Culture of Time and Space* is an excellent overview of the vast cultural, social, and technological changes that influenced modernist art. Many of the developments that Kern describes have been essentially forgotten, but his book lays out, in great detail, how the late nineteenth century was having its entire worldview altered by such massive ideas as Darwin's and such seemingly petty developments as the widespread use of pocket watches.

Further Reading

Carpenter, Humphrey, *A Serious Character: The Life of Ezra Pound*, Faber & Faber, 1988.

Carpenter's biography is the most extensive and detailed of the many books that tell the story of Pound's life.

Casillo, Robert, *The Genealogy of Demons*, Northwestern University Press, 1988.

Casillo confronts Pound's ugliest side: his fascist and anti-Semitic ideas.

Kenner, Hugh, *The Pound Era*, University of California Press, 1971.

Many consider this to be the definitive book not only on the Cantos but on Pound's contribution to twentieth- century literature and culture.

Rainey, Lawrence, *Ezra Pound and the Monument of Culture*, University of Chicago Press, 1991.

Rainey's book examines in close detail the historical and artistic sources behind the "Malatesta cantos" (8-11).

Terrell, Carroll F., *A Companion to 'The Cantos' of Ezra Pound*, University of California Press, 1980.

Terrell compiles an incredibly detailed and helpful annotation of almost every proper name, place, historical event, and foreign word used in Pound's poem.

Sources

Kenner, Hugh, *The Poetry of Ezra Pound*, University of Nebraska Press, 1985 (reprint).

Partisan Review, May 1949, p. 518.

"Poetry's New Priesthood," in *Saturday Review of Literature*, June 18, 1949, pp. 7-9, 38.

Sutton, Walter, *Ezra Pound: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Prentice-Hall, 1963.

"Treason's Strange Fruit: The Case of Ezra Pound and the Bollingen Award," in *Saturday Review of Literature*, June 11, 1949, pp. 9-11, 28.

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Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
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Introduction

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The purpose of Epics for Students (EfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's“For Students” Literature line, EfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on “classic” novels frequently

studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of EfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of EfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of “classic” novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals— helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

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Each entry, or chapter, in EfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
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- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as “The Narrator” and alphabetized as “Narrator.” If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. • Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name “Jean Louise Finch” would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname “Scout Finch.”
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by EfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an “at-a-glance” comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

EfS includes “The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,” a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Epics for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the EfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the EfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

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When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Epics for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from EfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

“Night.” Epics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from EfS (usually the first piece under the “Criticism” subhead), the following format should be used:

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Malak, Amin. “Margaret Atwood's “The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,” Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Epics for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of EfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. “Richard Wright: “Wearing the Mask,” in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Epics for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Epics for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535